What's Your Love Language?

"Reverend Apple" performed nuptials on an Apple II

By Kay Savetz

"With This Program I Thee Wed" — that's the headline for an article in InfoWorld, published March 30, 1981. "On Valentine's Day, InfoWorld witnessed 'the world's first computerized wedding,' according to the man who helped perform it." His assistant in the ceremony was "Reverend Apple" — an Apple II computer propped up on a stereo speaker. When asked if they take each other for spouses, Richard and Debbie (their last names were not given in the article) each typed "Y" for yes rather than "I do".

The officiant, Ron Jaenisch, a mail-order archbishop in the Universal Life Church, was quoted as saying "We're the ultramodern church... now the ultramodern thing is computers."

A UPI wire service article dated July 24 fills in some details: 'Hello, my name is Reverend Apple, I am the world's first ordained computer,' is how the ceremony is introduced on a display screen. Technically, the computer is an 'assistant' to Jaenisch, an ordained mail order minister of the Universal Life Church. Jaenisch simply starts each wedding by pushing the button marked 'RUN WED' … To prevent fumbling with rings, the computer instructs the couple to 'please place the rings on top of my console.' 'You may now kiss the bride,' a satisfied computer finally says."

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'Reverend Apple' Performs Ceremony

With This Program I Thee Wed

By John Barry

SUNNYVALE, CA—On Valentine's Day, *InfoWorld* witnessed "the world's first computerized wedding," according to the man who helped perform it. His assistant in the ceremony was "Reverend Apple."

Reinhard (Ron) Jaenisch is an "archbishop" in the Universal Life Church. He presides over his flock at his home/church in Sunnyvale, California.

"We're the ultramodern church," said Jaenisch, and "now the ultramodern thing is computers." That's what prompted him to use an Apple II computer in the wedding ceremony. Also instrumental, no doubt, in his decision was his full-time vocation: "software headhunter."

Reverend Apple sat on a stereo speaker, ready to tie the knot between Richard and Debbie. After Jaenisch pushed a few keys, the Reverend flashed some standard wedding-ritual script on his screen; Jaenisch repeated it.

That finished, the Reverend asked the couple if they would take each other as spouses. A simply "Y" (yes)—rather than a more complex "I do" suffices.

If someone answers "no," Jaenisch explained, the Reverend beeps and asks the question again. Reverend Apple is programmed to perform four types of ceremonies: ring for the

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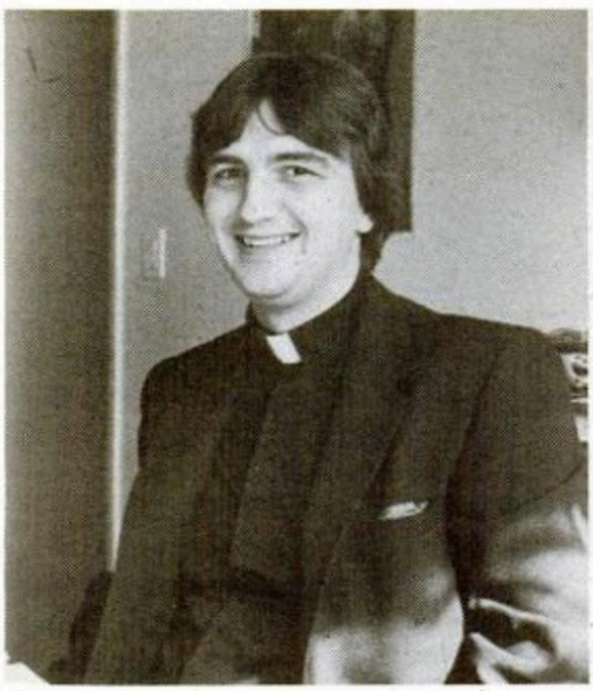
Richard kisses the bride; Jaenisch looks on, right. The Reverend peeks over Richard's shoulder.

The article concludes, "He admits business is slow. 'Most people think it's unromantic.' To change that image, he said, he plans to give the computer talking capabilities and add a wedding march."

Mentions of Jaenisch and his Reverend Apple program can be found in Time Magazine, Games Magazine, The Phil Donahue Show, The New York Times, and even in an Apple Computer advertisement: "Get hitched with an Apple" is number 28 in the 1982 ad "Will someone please tell me exactly what a personal computer can do?"

In February 2022, I interviewed Jaenisch about his career as an Apple-assisted officiant.



Ron Jaenisch at the time he performed his first computerized wedding

I worked in Silicon Valley. I had my own headhunting firm. One of my customers was Steve Jobs. Business was slow. I became an ordained minister, along with six million other people and about 30 or 40 dogs and cats. To keep busy at the office doing something, we decided to do weddings. And that worked out. What I found was a lot of the weddings didn't have 'the feeling'. They were very transactional. People would want to do it on their lunch break. Or they wanted to go to a bar to get married.

The whole idea on my end was, I really like computers. I like using them. People were afraid of computers. I wanted to move things forward. I wanted to do something that would be a bit more progress-oriented. So we did the computer wedding. The first one we did in a backyard. How could you be afraid of a computer? It married people! We were able to add value to progress, and make people feel comfortable with computers.

Your first computer wedding was in 1981. Tell me how you came to add a speech synthesizer to the Apple in 1982.

Word got out. I got a phone call from a person who worked for Apple Computer who said, "I'll help you out with it." We had the computerized wedding where you could press a few buttons and stuff like that, but we wanted to take it to the next level where we'd have the computer talk. And for that, Apple helped me out. It was very unofficial.

The Apple employee said, “Hey, come on over to the house. We’ll do this together and you’ll get the equipment. Don’t worry about it.” And all of a sudden, I started getting support for equipment that I never knew existed. 128K of RAM. That was a big deal.

And all of a sudden, I get these phone calls. The word gets out there. I get written up in InfoWorld magazine. I did a computer wedding of some couple, and they wound up being on Phil Donahue with me. I got written up in the Wall Street Journal. It was really a kick.

There was a couple who insisted on coming to my office and having the computer do the wedding ceremony, because he worked for Stanford Linear Accelerator Center. And that was the appropriate thing for him.

Did this start as a gimmick to get more people for your headhunting business, or a way to make money during the lean times?

No, no, no, no, no, no. It didn’t get anything for my headhunting business. The only thing it did was it kept my secretary busy. She had absolutely nothing to do. She was working only half the day, and so I had her filling out the wedding forms.

Also, it was a way of helping Apple Computer. The whole idea was, gee, computers were coming out, and too many people were afraid. I made it unscary. It’s going to marry people. How unscary is that?

I read that you charged $6 per wedding, but that you stopped officiating after doing six weddings.

It was more like $60 or something, and it was fewer than six weddings. First of all, most of the articles you read were [based on other articles]. They probably never interviewed me, whereas InfoWorld actually was there, took pictures and interviewed me.

Yet you got a lot of press for those “six or less weddings”. It was all over the place.

It got a ton of press! It was on the Voice of America [radio network].

I can’t imagine getting married by a computer made the experience any less transactional, the word you used.

The computer made it totally transactional. I figured, what the hell? But the real intention there was to take the fear off of computers. It was just silly. If I helped the world by taking the fear out of computers in some small way, then that’s the feather in my cap for this.

Did anybody ever complain this was sacrilegious, against God, or against marriage?

No. The only weird shit I ever had was the guy calling me up asking if I'd go do a wedding nude in the hot tub. They thought they'd freak me out by saying, "I want to have a computer in the Jacuzzi. And everybody will be naked." And I go, "Okay, that's fifty bucks more."

Is there any chance you still have a copy of the software?

No, no, no, no, no, I'm sorry. I can tell you that I wound up selling two copies. One copy to somebody in Canada. It was a TV station. I sold it for all of a hundred bucks, and I had trouble collecting so I wrote a letter to the Canadian embassy or something and immediately got my check.

And then I sold it to some lady in Florida. These were on something called floppy disks. Do you know what floppy disks are?

We know what floppy disks are.

So I sent it to a woman in Florida and she called up and said, "I really have a problem with this." What's the matter? "Well, I tried playing it on my record player and it didn't work."

Are you a religious person, a spiritual person, or more of a secular guy?

Thomas Jefferson and I have something in common. We're both theists. We're not atheists. We believe in God, but we don't believe in the McDonald's version of God or of religion.

Are you still using your Universal Life certificate?

Technically I'm ordained for life. I even paid $3.50 extra, so I'm an archbishop.

What do you do these days?

I continued with the headhunting business and did rather well. I eventually moved out of Silicon Valley and moved to San Diego and continued with the business down here. I stopped that years ago though. Now I live in Oceanside, California. I'm 71 years old. I'm not a spring chicken anymore; I don't really do much in the way of weddings or any of that kind of stuff.

If you could send a message to the people who are still using their Apple II computers today, what would you tell them?

Keep your Apple. I sold mine. It won't go down in value. It's a unique piece of history. It's a cute little machine.

Kay Savetz was unable to find any of the people married by Reverend Apple, but boy did they try. You can find Kay on Bluesky.

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